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Meeting attendance low? Try five strategies

Regular meeting attendance can be crucial to the effectiveness of a board. But a variety of issues can lead to no-shows, whether they're unwanted travel expenses, increased frequency of meetings or even a simple loss of interest.

Boost enthusiasm

Here are five ways to combat low attendance and ensure regular, fully staffed board meetings:

- Make reminder calls. Telephone follow-up dramatically increases likelihood of attendance.
- Send feedback surveys. Find out what board members liked about the last meeting and what they'd like to change for the next one.
- Bring in a guest speaker. Invite a constituent, or a representative of the nonprofit community, to discuss common interests.
- Promote it everywhere. Announce it on the website, post about it on Facebook – just get attendees excited about going.
- Change the location. A new venue or different time can shake things up and increase interest.

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ARTISTS' TOOLBOX

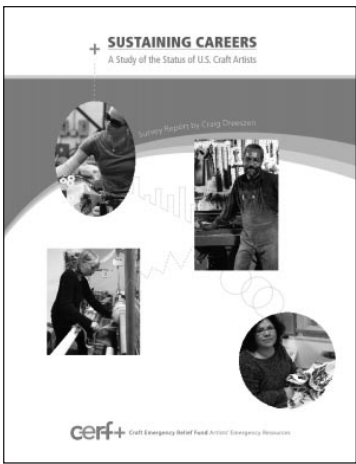
New report studies status of craft artists

CERF+ (Craft Emergency Relief Fund + Artists' Emergency Resources) recently released the results of its national research study, *Sustaining Careers: A Study of the Status of U.S. Craft Artists*. The 54-page report is available to read online or download free from the CERF+ website.

Sustaining Careers examines craft artists' attitudes about trends affecting the field, sales and income, insurance, emergency preparedness and recovery, and legacy planning. It also provides updates and comparison data with its 2004 national research study. Some compelling insights are:

Work and income

- 72% of full-time craft artists net less than \$25,000 per year from their art-related income with 45% of them netting under \$10,000 per year.
- Only about one-quarter of full-time craft artists provide over 80% of their family income.



Survey respondents reported income in ranges, providing a very different picture than looking at mean and median incomes. The results are sobering, but also reveal that craft artists do not rely solely on their craft businesses to support their families

Business preparedness and insurance

- 60% of craft artists remain uninsured for business-related losses.

- CERF+ has seen an almost 9% improvement in those who are properly insured for business losses since the 2007 insurance survey.

The misconception that homeowners insurance provides coverage for art-related losses is still commonly held.

Emergency preparedness and career vulnerability

- Craft artists familiar with CERF+ programs, or who have received CERF+ information or communications, or who have a copy

of CERF+'s Studio Protector, are about 10% more likely to have taken safety and preparedness precautions than those who had not heard of CERF+.

- Over a quarter (27%) of respondents had suffered an injury or illness that has significantly reduced their capacity to work.
- Nearly half of all responding craft artists (47%) do not have sufficient cash reserves (cash and accounts receivable) to meet their household expenses for one month.

American craft artists are under-prepared to meet an emergency, whether it's personal, weather-related, or financial. While 96% of all artists have some college education, many describe being hindered by a lack of business training.

CERF+ plans to use information learned from this research to help safeguard and strengthen the careers of craft artists throughout the nation. CERF+'s staff and board believe this will also serve to enlighten the craft field and arts sector as a whole about the needs, challenges, and opportunities artists face as they work to sustain their careers.

The full *Sustaining Careers* report, as well as an executive summary, is free and available to read online or to download from www.craftemergency.org

NONPROFIT NEWS

Twelve best practices for effective email deployments

Nonprofit supporters can get bombarded by emails. How do you ensure your emails are as effective as they can be – and not getting lost in the virtual pile?

The 12 best practices

These best practices can help ensure you're on the right track with your emails.

1. Keep your list clean. Honor all unsubscribes and make sure they stay excluded.
2. Analyze data. Consider strategies to change interactions with unresponsive addresses.
3. Personalize. A personal, conversational touch increases conversion rates.
4. Optimize send time. Test different days and times to see what works best.

5. Be CAN-SPAM compliant. A lack of unsubscribe links and contact info can lead to a large fine.
6. Handle replies. Replies should receive a timely response.
7. Test in multiple platforms. Design emails with PCs, tablets and phones in mind.
8. Don't be image-heavy. Flash and JavaScript might not work in all programs.
9. Use relevant subject lines. Avoid spam-triggers, such as the word "free."
10. Encourage interaction. Tell them to share, comment and tweet what they learn.
11. Work to be "whitelisted." You want your IP address recognized and welcome.
12. Ensure quality. Proofread for branding and accuracy.

Source: grizzard.com

One in four board members aren't engaged: *Here's how to get them back*

Boards are the lifeblood of nonprofit organizations. So why is it that one in four board members isn't engaged in the nonprofit's mission? That's according to a recent survey by StreamLink Software and the Axelson Center for Nonprofit Management.

What they said – and didn't

When given a list of possible reasons behind becoming a board member, answers included "being asked to participate by someone in the organization," "wanting to work with a specific person on the board" or "board service being an employment requirement."

Here's what they didn't say:

- 34% didn't select "belief in the organization's mission," and
- 19% didn't select "belief in the organization's mission" or "desire to further the organization's strategic direction."

Spotting low engagement

Here are the three major signs of flagging engagement:

- Low attendance – Board members missing meetings or constantly showing up late is a red flag.
- High turnover – A revolving door makes it difficult to keep up a consistent vision.
- Low productivity – Seen in missed deadlines, diminished fundraising success and fewer new member referrals.

Myths and misconceptions

Board leaders need to tackle the causes of complacency – not myths, such as:

- "I expect too much of my board already" – Actually, more than eight out of 10 members think expectations are reasonable.
- "Board members don't volunteer because they don't want to" – Survey responses indicate board members often don't know how or where to offer suggestions or volunteer skills.
- "I don't have high turnover, so board members must be happy" – Nearly 30% said they were unsure of, or dissatisfied with, their contributions, and may be staying out of obligation.

The truth: Low engagement is often the result of mission misalignment, unclear objectives, confused communications and poor use of board members' backgrounds and talents.

Righting the ship

Take these steps to boost engagement:

- Realign missions by conducting self-assessments to evaluate effectiveness and promote discussion.
- Manage expectations by clearly articulating expectations and tracking individual progress. Make members feel like they're a critical part of success.
- Break down communication silos by making resources and info more accessible.
- Plug in talent, making use of members' skills and connections.

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